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The parallax gap, identified by philosopher Slavoj Žižek, encourages us to appreciate architecture and urban space psychoanalytically, helping understand spatial dislocations and disorientations.

Parallax as distortion within city space

Louis D'Arcy Reed

> […] *the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. The philosophical twist to be added, of course, is that the observed difference is not simply 'subjective', due to the fact that the same object which exists 'out there' is seen from two different stations, or points of view.*
>
> Slavoj Žižek, 'Architectural Parallax: Spandrels and Other Phenomena of Class Struggle' (2009).[1]

The philosopher Slavoj Žižek's paper 'Architectural Parallax: Spandrels and Other Phenomena of Class Struggle' was presented at the Tilton Gallery, New York, on 23 April 2009 as part of the *Lacanian Ink 33 Event: Le Sinthome*. It marked the philosopher's first foray into public discussions of architecture. The text was later developed as a chapter in the 2011 book *Living in the End Times*. As noted at the outset, Žižek claimed that his knowledge of architecture at that time was restricted to Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead* (1943), Stalinist aesthetics, and his personal dream of a house 'comprised of only secondary spaces and places of passage'.[2] For Žižek, whose paper concerned culture and its relationships within capitalist economies, 'there is a coded message in an architectural formal play'. '[T]he message delivered by a building often functions as the "return of the repressed" of the official ideology.'[3]

Žižek thus identifies a so-called 'parallax gap', which, he argues, lies 'in the inscription of our changing temporal experience when we approach and enter a building'.[4] This paper argues that the inscribed parallax gap proposed by Žižek affects equally the urban fabrics of our contemporary and future cities. It necessitates a remediation of space to account for psychological and physical forms of urban disorientation.[5]

In the first part of this article, I will address the Žižekian parallax. I will consider its relevance across disciplinary boundaries of architecture and psychoanalysis. I seek to uncover links to social space in Žižek's theory. Following this, I will review Žižek's parallax through the lens of two connected thinkers: phenomenology inspired American architect Steven Holl in the 2000s; and Canadian architectural historian and scholar Peter Collins in the 1960s. The notion of parallax and its role in disorienting space is discussed through an application of both psychoanalytical and architectural ideas, followed by a reflection on how cities can be constituted from parallax gaps. This is then explored in a brief examination of parallax with particular focus on the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan, designed by Zaha Hadid Architects and completed in 2012. Therefore, what follows is located at the intersection of architecture, human geography, psychoanalysis, sociology, and urban studies.

It important to note here an influence, and antithetical relationship to, the work of philosopher David Hill and sociologist Daryl Martin.[6] In 'Visibly Mute: Ethical Sociality and the Everyday Exurban', Hill and Martin suggest that 'environments are experienced as saturated mediascapes advertising capitalist orthodoxies, or as spaces that to a large degree become mute by withdrawing from the understanding of those who inhabit them'.[7] Hill and Martin study exurban and commercial spaces, where the mutability of space becomes a unique dimension of what Henri Lefebvre calls the production of space. Instead, I argue, the parallax becomes its own fertile concept of space to interrogate and expand.

Žižekian parallax

When Žižek introduced his idea of parallax, and linked it to architectural thought, it was restricted to his typical disciplinary concerns of philosophy, Marxism, and Hegelian and Lacanian dialectics. In *The Parallax View* (2006), Žižek first highlighted a parallax gap. He understood it as an opportunity to rethink dialectical materialism or, put differently, to conceive of the parallax gap in a materialist way.[8] In other words, he argued that architectural space is buried in materialist ideologies: in the workings of philosophy, science, and politics, taking up

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questions of ontological difference, the consciousness/brain distinction, and class struggle. This is Žižek's version of the antagonism – or parallax – around which societies are organised.[9]

Thus, the parallax gap, adapted from Kojin Karatani's *Transcritique* (2003) accepts the irreducibility of Kantian contradictions (also known as antinomies) and forecasts a potential gap between the two positions revealing 'difference' (parallax) in one's experience of reality. Later, Žižek employs Hegelian thought in line with the parallax gap: 'to gain insight – through a purely formal parallax shift – into how positing the distinction "as such" already is the looked for "reconciliation"'.[10] By which Žižek proposes a dimension where someone in the city – an observer, for example – is unable to see that they already have what they are seeking. Here, Žižek's parallax gap enters into a dialogue between what psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan called 'the real' and 'the symbolic'. For Lacan, the inability of the symbolic to totally encompass its referents and to represent fully what has been lost creates a constant gradient of desire: a perpetual reaching out for the pure reality behind representation.[11] The ontic Reality (which does exist, but is forever unknowable) is not captured in how a semiotic object (a building) is interpreted and understood. This can be understood as a Kantian epistemological gap between ontic Reality and the semiotic sign system that attempts to grasp the elusive Reality, either temporarily or in a definitive manner, once and for all.[12] It is therefore in the Real that a psychoanalytical gap emerges. Lacan stated: 'the Real is a black hole, a negative space of non-sociality, indeed of non-subjectivity'.[13] In Žižekian terms, the status of the Real is ultimately purely parallactic. It is non-substantial: it has no substantial density in itself; it is just a gap between two points of perspective, perceptible only in the shift from the one to the other.[14]

Political theorist Jodi Dean noted, however, how Žižek:

> *revise*[*s*] *Lacan's notion of the Real. In contrast to Lacan's Real, Žižek's parallax Real is not a sameness persisting underneath changing symbolizations.* [...] *Instead, the parallax Real is the gap in perspectives, the shift from one to another, that inaccessible disavowed X that distorts our vision.*[15]

Lacan wrote about the search for what he called '*Objet petit a*' within the real. This was a name for a desirable object that can never be attained. This search is pronounced within Žižek's parallax, where an inability to grasp the real – beyond the symbolic order – creates a space for the *Objet petit a*. Here, 'it exists – its presence can be discerned – only when the landscape is viewed from a certain perspective'.[16] The *Objet petit a* thus functions within what can be called the master-signifier relationship of desire. The ontological 'subject' as the desired 'object' inverts the role of spaces surrounding the architectural showpiece 'object' to fulfil desire.

Here, the parallax gap exposes itself as an unfathomable X, which forever eludes the symbolic grasp, and thus causes a multiplicity of symbolic perspectives.[17] I therefore propose that the parallax gap is the ingrained unseen of spaces. It is an excess space revealing the 'lack' inherent within architecture *and* its surroundings. This can be unseen political wishes, incommensurability between people and object, or purely a mode of neoliberal and capitalist reproductions of space and meaning.

The ingrained unseen of spaces

The Real, or its multiple Reality/ies exists 'because of the split in the Real, because of the fact that the Real is characterized by a pronounced parallax',[18] in which, 'multiplicity, then, is not the primary ontological fact of being/becoming'.[19] Among the philosophical interpretations and his jokes, Žižek raises Herman Melville's character Bartleby who evokes the parallax. The 'new space outside the hegemonic position and its negation'[20] becomes apparent in his cry to his employer of 'I would prefer not to'. In Bartleby's simultaneous withdrawal from resistance and the charity offered by his employer, Žižek reveals the nature inherent in the parallax gap: '[…] the very frantic and engaged activity of constructing a new order is sustained by an underlying "I would prefer not to" which forever reverberates […]'.[21] And it is within this gap that a concept of space can be identified, where one can '[…] draw the same conclusions at the most general level of ontological difference itself', bringing 'to an extreme the traditional philosophical difference between the physical level and the metaphysical level, between the empirical and transcendental'.[22]

In 2009, Žižek revised his notion of the parallax gap in the context of architecture. This was 'not a grand philosophical theory to interrogate the underlying architectural system in the western thought which goes back to Georges Bataille',[23] Nadir Lahiji writes. Žižek 'is neither interested to put the question of architecture into the grand narrative of Ontology (at least not for the time being)'.[24] Žižek instead allies psychoanalysis with Fredric Jameson's 1982 of '[…] a political unconscious [which] proposes that we understand just such a final analysis and explore their multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artefact as socially symbolic act'.[25] Jameson later suggests that it is not only the fantasy embodied in the mute language of buildings that can articulate the utopia of justice, freedom, and equality betrayed by actual social relations. This fantasy can also articulate a longing for inequality, for a clear-cut hierarchy and for class distinctions.[26]

What this entails, the crux of Žižek's hypothesis, is that examples of postmodern architecture effectively 'try to impose themselves as architectural zero-institutions: their conflictual meanings cancel each other out, […] their meaning is to have no meaning, to be islands of meaning in the flow of our meaningless daily

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1. The Heydar Aliyev Center, Baku, Azerbaijan, completed 2012.

existence'.[27] Žižek discusses the architectural manifestation of this thesis in relation to two different postmodern design strategies exemplified by the work of Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind: 'as two desperate (or joyous) attempts to combine two incompatible structuring principles within the same building'.[28] Think of Frank Gehry's lauded home in Santa Monica, or Libeskind's Royal Ontario Museum extension. Žižek argues that not only contemporary cultural institutions, but architectural interventions on the scale of 'starchitecture' – 'an iconic building' or regenerative urbanism at the heart of cities – exapt the parallax gap. An invisibly cloaked spatial form of identity and desire surrounds at all times, which can be understood through the application of psychoanalytic clinics to uncover four conditions of the parallax gap:

- postmodernism and class struggle, where the penchant for a multitude of space systems, aesthetic multiplicity, and segregation between the public have resulted in dichotomies within architecture;
- incommensurability, which determines that when 'a building embodies democratic openness, this appearance is never a mere appearance – it has a reality of its own, it structures the way individuals interact in their real lives';[29]
- the sociopolitical envelope, exemplifying Žižek's resolve to expose the ideal ego of architecture – that is, how at the imaginary level, architecture likes to project an idealised image of itself, to present a likeable image to the outside; and finally
- spandrels, the assertion of a gap between skin and structure – an unexpected interstitial space.

Žižek hypothesises that:

> *the parallax gap in architecture means that the spatial disposition of a building cannot be understood without reference to the temporal dimension: the parallax gap is the inscription of our changing temporal experience when we* approach *and* enter *a building*.[30]

For Lahiji, Žižek's argument is both dialectical and political. It is precisely this gap that provides the undecidable space where class struggle can be staged.[31] Later in Žižek's *oeuvre* he talks about a parallax being exapted through the process of architectural antagonism. Using the movie *Psycho* (1960) as an example, the incommensurability between protagonists and architectural environments highlights the parallactic nature of architecture. The theory here is that all tension and trauma could be resolved – for Norman Bates, *Psycho's* protagonist – through a 'short-circuit' synthesising the Modernist hotel and the Gothic mansion. For an alternative comparison, we can turn to the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu where social reality is a collection of invisible relationships: a 'social space' organised in terms of relationships where individuals and groups are reciprocally positioned.[32] These positions are based on the distribution of social wealth, i.e. on the possession of position-related economic and cultural capital.[33]

Rather than see the interstitial as pertaining to revolutions, uprisings, or protests that spring from the spaces *between* things, I imagine instead a sort of ontological *poché* that would exist permanently

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as an excess within Žižek's parallax. In connecting architecture, this element of excess is apparent in the parallactic nature of city space: the privately owned, yet public, spaces; or the penchant for vast atria thresholds. It is these spaces which realise the other dimension of Žižek's parallax in the urban fabric, revealing the mute language of psycho-social conditions. It is not only the time of architecture's realisation, or the building type, that determine the meaning of the structure. Rather, meaning emerges from the sets of perspectives, representations and practical usages that define the built environment.[34] One can embrace the parallax gap inscribed into a building and its envelope yet still witness the consequence of Žižek's parallax applied *onto* and *around* architectural elements, intertwined, as it were, like a Möbius strip. This encircles a central void or tension, revealing the wider implication of space as no longer solely malleable by design alone. [35] Recall Bourdieu's assertion that 'social space' is organised as relationships where individuals and groups are positioned reciprocally.[36] One can then legitimise the parallax gap present *within* the city, for traversing the city is changing one's own 'temporal experience when we approach and enter a building'.[37] Here, contemporary city fabrics entail Henri Lefebvre's view of the built spaces of a capitalist society as 'abstract space, the core characteristic of which is the simultaneous occurrence of homogenisation and fragmentation'.[38] This illustrates a fundamental quality key to our conception of the parallax gap: this failure, this void, *is a subject itself*. Psychoanalysts stress the need for environments to be well proportioned for different activities. They emphasise the value of emotional states, such as contemplation, merriment, or wonder, aroused by particular built spaces.[39] This is reasserted in the parallax gap as a quantity to identify the becoming and abstraction of spatial dimensions. It affirms what might be called the spatially dictated dialectics of political motivations; an abstraction imbricating psychological anxiety, trauma, and disorientation.

Reviewing the parallax

The notion of parallax is more commonly aligned to the disciplines of astrophysics and computer architecture than the mechanics of internal or external space, or the spatial disfigurations within the built environment. However, parallax has architectural heritage that is ripe for examination. It has roots in Gothic, Neo-classical, Rococo and Modernist architectural styles, rife in new designs and proposals. Turning to a contemporary example, parallax is consistently explored by American-architect Steven Holl from whom it serves as a design philosophy. Holl's book of 2000 titled *Parallax* states that 'Parallax – the change in the arrangement of surfaces that define space as a result of the change in the position of a viewer – is transformed when movement axes leave the horizontal dimension.'[40]

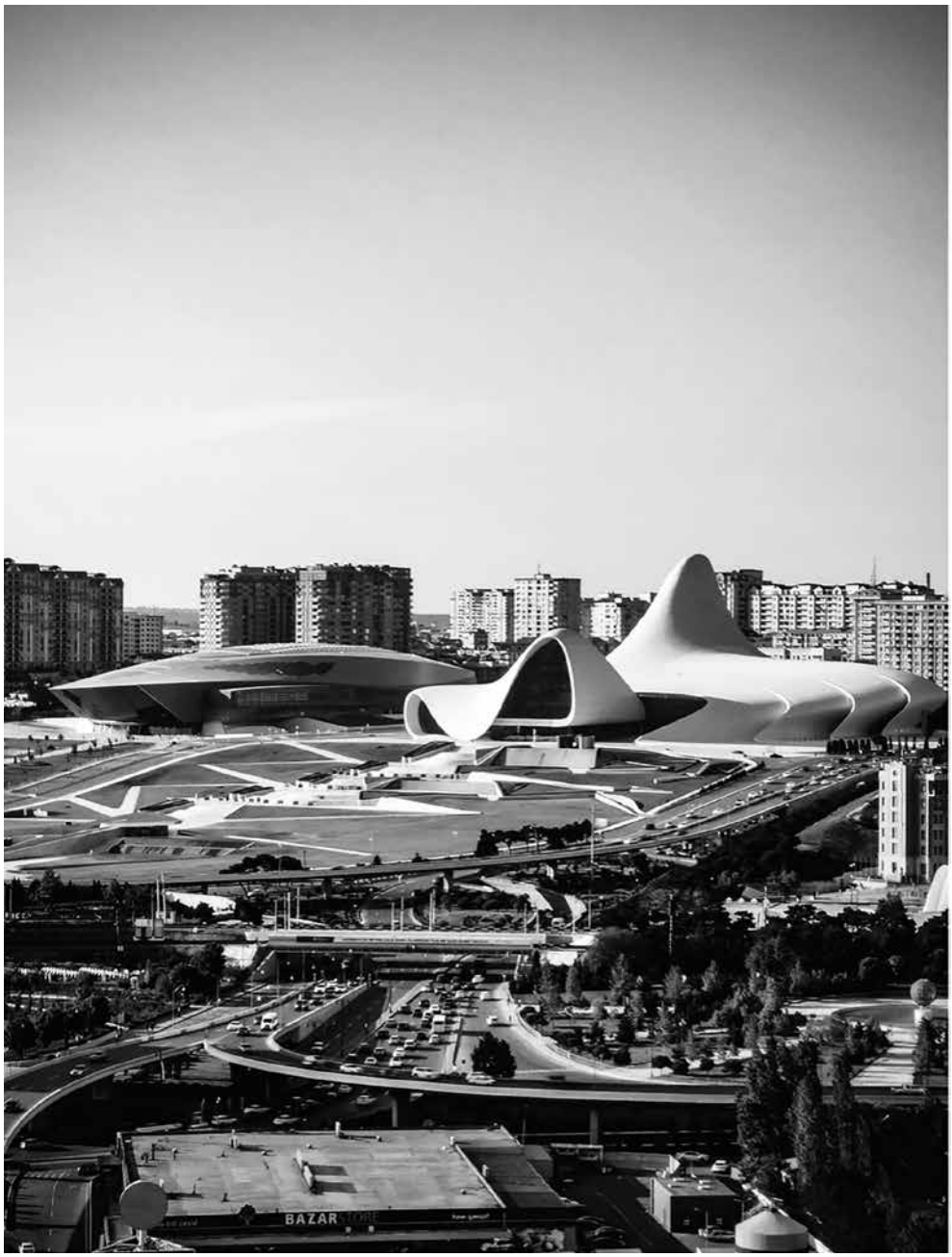
Holl is inspired by the phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who posits that one's phenomenological experience of spaces, usually through movement, is a conscious aspect of our psyche: 'the spatiality of body is brought into being'.[41] Holl works with a conception of aesthetic appeal that is greatly enriched by phenomenology,[42] specifically the ontic dimension of *being* within the city or, as Žižek suggests, an approach to buildings, transfers and embodied experiences *between* buildings. [43]

In restricting the parallax gap to just *within* a building, Holl demotes the ontological narratives of users and observers that are enriched through the recognition and exploitation of numerous relationships accessible to vision and also to the feeling and moving body.[44] One wrestles between a perceptive state of mind and architecture's affective qualities which underscores spatial configurations of the parallax gap in cities. This is an area that has no definitive 'reality' or 'plasticity' in its use or prescription: the parallax is an effect of space that distorts, disfigures, and reveals new dimensions for the observer. The dislocations, or change in spatial considerations, lead to *disorientation*, affording opportunities to dismantle the conception of architecture as an *object in space*. Rather, architecture becomes *an object affecting space*: 'as kind of "analytic object", located in the area of overlap between architectural object and critic, with reference to the setting as the architecture of psychoanalysis'.[45] For Žižek, a provocation of ontic Reality and the semiotic object alleviates architecture from static objects within their settings, becoming powerful relation objects that fit into different configurations of cities, development, and transformation.

Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas stresses the importance of architecture's symbolic, evocative, and spiritual dimension, and the serious damage suffered by our era because of its loss – the anonymous shopping centre replacing the marketplace, for example.[46] Architecture is an analytic object itself *within* the parallax. 'The object is thus situated in two places: it belongs to the internal space on the two levels of the conscious and unconscious, and it is also present in the external space as object, as other, as another subject.'[47] The parallax can work as a means of rethinking how observers, creators, and architects respond to, produce and destabilise place and locality.[48]

The architectural historian Peter Collins discussed the parallax in his 1965 book *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture 1750–1950*, arguing that parallels could be observed between Baroque explorations of space and the Modernist architecture of his time. Solidifying their role as a commentator with a number of publications including *Concrete* (1959) and *Architectural Judgment* (1971), Collins defined parallax as an architectural condition experienced directly by a visitor to a building, 'whereby an apparent displacement of objects occurs when the point of observation changes'.[49] The encounter with

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2. Parametric intervention within Baku's urban fabric. A dislocation of city space?

architectural space was both physical *and* cognitive; initially noting that the spatial-temporal shifts within Neo-classical vernaculars presented spatial change – or a series of dislocations – where the space of buildings morphed in a dynamically shifting mode, exacerbating qualities of the parallax. To Collins, parallax was omnipresent in Post-war Modernism, where 'the visual effects usually referred to as Space-Time, Fourth-Dimensional, and so on, are nothing more or less than modern developments of the exploitation of effects of parallax'.[50] Collins determined that 'the idea of "Space-Time" is [such] an essential element of contemporary architecture that [architects] may consider it an impertinence to enquire whether, outside the realm of astronomy and nuclear physics, the term means anything at all'.[51] Collins' distaste for the architecture of his time becomes clear, recycling the parallax under the nomenclature of science and forsaking history. Many modern architects were fascinated between the fusion of scientific material technologies and the prescription of space in demarcations of leisure, exercise, and work. One only needs to look at Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* (1948), for an example of this penchant for demarcating and configuring space. Collins emphasised the pronounced disassociation of the architects of the time who remained blind to the dissociative qualities within parallax. For example, Collins challenges the single viewpoint in Sigfried Giedion's comparisons of the Bauhaus to Picasso:

> *The major endeavors of modern architecture are fulfilled here*, [...] *there is the hovering, vertical grouping of planes which satisfies our feeling for a relational space, and there is the extensive transparency that permits interior and exterior to be seen simultaneously, en face and en profit,*

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> *like* Picasso's L'Arlesienne *of 1911–12: variety of levels of reference, or of points of reference, and simultaneity – the conception of space-time* […] *The aim is not to anchor* [the cubes of the building] *to the ground but to have them float or hover upon the site* […].[52]

Collins felt that Giedion's association of architecture with cubism's multiplicity of space and perspectives was false.[53] A painting like Picasso's *'Violin Hanging on the Wall'* (1912–13), for example, reconstitutes the image of the instrument itself, and its relation to the wall on which it is hanging, as if the painter is repeatedly shifting his perspective. It apprehends the violin not simply as a three-dimensional object but a four-dimensional one: that is, an object situated in time as well as space.[54] For Collins, 'this evolutionary theory is only possible if one considers the *creation* of space to be indistinguishable from the *depiction* of space'.[55] The multiplication of real effects of parallax was not possible until modern materials,[56] but the historicity of architecture remains rife with artificial efforts too, like Rococo and Baroque decorators using large mirrors to create *trompe l'oeil*. Thus, the observer saw architectural spaces 'extended in an infinite parallactic sequence beyond the confines of the room'.[57] The parallactic displacement of objects was not the sole manipulation of architectural elements however, for parallax occurs in every large space, but it remained conducive to other methods of spatial dislocations for Collins. 'It has been', he wrote, 'an important element of architectural composition, and has been manifest in architecture ever since the first hypostyle hall was constructed.'[58]

For Collins, an aesthetic revolution in architecture up to 1965 (the publishing of *Changing Ideals*) demonstrated a reversal of parallax could be found in the work of modernists such as Mies van der Rohe or Walter Gropius. However, it was the work of Le Corbusier that displayed exploitation of the parallax best. Villa Savoye (1931), was 'hollowed out; the building is self-contained but space burrows in rather than spilling out in separate parts'.[59] Such reversal implied irrational and unexpected forms within the building: a kind of anti-architecture where gardens are inside, or walls on colonnades.[60] Collins later suggested that the parallax's most striking development is in the use of high towers, which change their apparent relationship as one moves round the building.[61] This is a parallactic quality present in both interiors *and* exteriors. The interesting link here is present within phenomenology, where the subject is both aware of the object, but affected by it also. This is witnessed in the theory and works of Holl, where the bond between subject, space, and object extends to the subject occupying a space, where an object demonstrates a subject. A shared inhabiting of the space creates a synonymous agreement between subject and object, a lived bodily experience that takes place. This draws upon philosopher Martin Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*: the main feature of human existence and the knowing of our own existence.[62] Žižek's psychoanalytic parallax is related to Collins' ideas, introducing an understanding of unconscious excesses and spatial disorientation.

Parallax excesses

Žižek's parallax gap extends Collins' manipulation of cognitive dimensions where, instead of just the abstraction of space through architecture, architecture reveals its unconscious *through* its excesses of space.

This theory can be illustrated by comparing Collins' reversal of parallax, where space that 'burrows in' mirrors Žižek's excesses, where metaphysical and physical collide revealing parallactic dichotomies. Therefore, we can quantify all spaces created by architecture as exponents of parallax within the city. It is thus the space between that gains significance.[63] We can picture a building as a moving modulator regulating different intensities of engagement, redirecting users' attention, mixing and putting people together, concentrating flows of actors and distributing them so as to compose a productive force in time-space.[64]

Brenner and Theodore have characterised cities as the 'incubators' of political strategies through which the various instantiations of neoliberal logic are rolled out in quotidian ways.[65] This is related to Lefebvre's semiotically driven spaces, contingent on signs and symbols, to signals, and 'landscapes to be consumed according to a logic of visualization'.[66] The key to representing a parallax space lies in interrogating the excesses involved: excesses of neoliberalism, politically driven interventions, spaces of neuroses, or similarly metaphysical or psychosocial influenced space.

Parallax space does not become solely a criticism of capitalist space. Environments are experienced as 'saturated mediascapes' advertising capitalist orthodoxies, or as spaces that mutely withdraw from the understanding of those who inhabit them.[67] Hill and Martin dissect the exurban environment as constraining to highlight the importance of spatial forms, especially those we routinely experience. They shape wider cultural practices and critical politics where the parallax assumes political hierarchies that converge upon architectural practices, exaggerating the excesses between the cognitive and physical ontology.[68]

For the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, such encounter is a lost art, something society has come to resist as the dissolution of community under neoliberal capitalism has prompted an anxiety towards those with whom we are unfamiliar.[69] As such, one can argue that encounter extends to parallax and the disorienting characteristics evoked within it by architecture. A further link to this is evident in philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's work where his theory of explicitation 'exists as the politics of climatisation and social uteri describe a new paradigm that requires not just a reconsideration of the technologies and economics of the building envelope, but of its political, social, and, psychological implications'.[70] This concept

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could be conceived as leaning heavily on phenomenology, related to Derrida's hauntology or architecture just becoming 'encountered as being connected, made up by interrelations between buildings rather than the impact of buildings on their own'.[71] The parallax is not merely a reversal of Harvey's 'relational space'[72] or Beaumont's 'politics of the visor' in architecture's expression of absolute capitalist logics, 'where everyday embodiment of an urban society that, in both its state and corporate forms, interpellates people as atomized individuals subject to an insidious system of surveillance'.[73] It detracts from 'bigness' as theorised in Rem Koolhaas's 1995 book *S,M,L,XL*[74] and Charles Jencks's extreme 'isotropic space', defined as emancipated by the technological advancements in architecture.[75] Instead, the parallax is firmly rooted in the psychoanalytic experience of our city.

Where Žižek proposed a 'gap' inscribed into buildings, extending into the projection of virtual and hidden spaces akin to post-capitalist sci-fi dystopias, the gap becomes more than simply a 'gap'. It burrows out. Indeed, it bleeds or spills, becoming a system of interpretation that includes architecture, materials, assemblage, cognition, relationships, politics, cultures, or class representation. The parallax demonstrates a condition where public and private, transparency and restriction, democratic openness and conservative refusals, vie for metaphysical hierarchy, forsaking the potential within the excesses of spatial possibility. Such an approach extends our understanding of Lacanian influence between psychoanalysts and architects 'that there is method in the seeming madness, an altogether identifiable logic behind those interruptions, in other words, that there is nothing random about them whatsoever'.[76]

Parallax in practice

In the discussion that follows, I briefly apply these ideas of the parallax. I combine Žižekian parallax and architectural ideas with the aim of revealing disorienting spaces within cities and the excesses they can reveal. While a detailed in situ spatial analysis would afford for more meaningful outcomes,[77] interrogating the unconscious language of place with the physical movements of the body (among self and others), a *vignette of inquiry* can assist in considering the *excesses* of spaces – 'between the physical level and the metaphysical level, between the empirical and transcendental'.[78]

In Baku's Northern zone lies the Heydar Aliyev Center *[1]* designed by Zaha Hadid Architects, opened in 2012. The building serves as a cultural centre for Baku and emblem of the city's evolution into the twenty-first century. Housing an auditorium, museum, and multipurpose hall, the building is one among many new symbols of Baku that build the ambience of place and the physical image of the city, marking another period in the life of the city and the country since it regained independence in 1991 following the fall of the Soviet Union.[79] As Azerbaijan transitions to a post-oil economy, its lively and increasingly diverse art scene, centred on Baku, receives support from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, as well as the Azerbaijani Culture Friends Foundation and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation led by first lady Mehriban Aliyeva.[80] As a state-run and delivered building, Hadid's parametricism sits in contrast to Baku's existing urban fabric, which is made up of stock from Islamic and Western Architecture, in conjunction with Soviet-era designed blocks . For Felix Mara, writing in *The Architects' Journal*:

> *Some may say that Hadid's commission lacks a raison d'être, that the practice was just a big hired gun, chosen to roll out an eye-catching landmark for the capital. Even if the Republic of Azerbaijan chose Hadid for the sole reason that it wanted to entrust the design of a highly symbolic building to the best, and not simply the most prestigious architect, this would not in itself mean the project was inherently flawed. The litmus test needed to determine whether the Aliyev Centre is more than an import involves evaluating the specificity of its as-built programme and response to its site and regional context.*[81]

Mara continues that:

> *This illusion of weightlessness is created by the imaginative design and construction of the external envelope and the space frame which supports it, and relies on untold investment by a powerful and determined client.*[82]

It is in the conjunction between architectural style, form, envelope, transparency, and function that we begin to see the parallax emerge *before* entering its internal spaces. The building is as an eye-catching landmark,[83] but functions in 'the very frantic and engaged activity of constructing a new order […] sustained by an underlying "I would prefer not to" which forever reverberates',[84] or the fantasy embodied in the mute language of buildings that can articulate the utopia of justice, freedom, and equality betrayed by actual social relations. Indeed, this fantasy can also articulate a longing for inequality, for a clear-cut hierarchy and for class distinctions.[85] As a result, 'the direct embodiment of the ideological function of providing a neutral all-encompassing space in which social antagonism is obliterated, in which all members of society can recognize themselves',[86] is eradicated by the architecture which consciously disturbs the space of the city as a sociopolitical exercise.

The Centre's construction had been criticised by the media for its abuse of workers and the evictions that took place to clear its site.[87] Hadid's intervention in Baku evidences how the parallax contributes to an idea of a modulator regulating different intensities of engagement.[88] The engagements are radiated into the space of the city, affecting the physical and temporal again '[...] draw[ing] conclusions at the most general level of ontological difference itself: […] bring[ing] to an extreme the traditional philosophical difference between the physical level and the metaphysical level, between the empirical and transcendental'.[89] Collins' 'creation of space to be indistinguishable from the depiction of space'[90]

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imbricates Holl's arrangement of surfaces that define space[91] and Žižekian 'transfers and embodied experiences between buildings'.[92] One sees an incongruous intervention of space, both as an extraordinary piece of architecture and design, but also as an image of state-funded intervention where the environment can be experienced as Hill's and Martyn's 'saturated mediascape' advertising capitalist orthodoxies or mutely withdrawing from the understanding of those who inhabit them.[93] The context immediately surrounding and on approach has forever changed, and similarly its spatial excesses, where a parallax between reality and elementary space dislocates both the urban and cognitive fabric of the built environment *[2]*. The past is obfuscated, where Reality in the wake of political and social unconsciousness of a perceived lack, or loss, is traded for desire and fantasy through an investment in *Objet petit a.* This positions excesses for disorientation to occur: excesses of politically driven interventions, excesses of past and present ideologies, excesses of incommensurability, excesses of meaning, and excesses of belonging. The perspectives of the exterior and interior of Baku's Heydar Aliyev Center cannot remain *just* isolated to an absolute viewing of the object. An integration of excesses and relationships not only puncture the space of cities but occupy the metaphysical layering present in parallax.

Parallax as disorientation within city space

In this discussion, I have presented the parallax as an element of spatial consideration that works in a reciprocal arrangement between object and subject, which caters for a rereading of engagement and of elucidating oneself from space as a concept restrained by dimensions, temporality, elements of design, and historicity. Parallax affords a radical rereading of spatial disorientation. No longer is space produced alone and dependent on an encounter to foster dislocations between what is seen and experienced. Instead, it bleeds into the shared spatial dimension and subsumes the demarcated boundaries present within the postmodern landscapes of contemporary cities. Architectures serve as vessels within the circulatory system of parallax, where 'space' invades beyond physical and cognitive dimensions and instead ruptures, causing the excess dimension for inquiry. Where Collins identified parallactic space occurring in all manners of space, the built environment under a Žižekian lens resists becoming merely 'islands of meaning in the flow of our meaningless daily existence'.[94] Hill and Martin's 'saturated mediascapes' or the 'spaces that to a large degree become mutely withdrawing from the understanding of those who inhabit them' echo this potential reading of Žižekian built environment.[95] Architectural intervention exapts spatial excesses, invisibly heightening unconscious cognitive influences across physical, virtual, and social dimensions as a means to obfuscate political, neoliberal, or other intrusions on perspectives.

As a result, the excesses *within* space are today an upgraded form of spatial encounter and experience. The disorientation in parallax conceives space as a contested arena: an event-space where one's encounter can be forever programmed or reprogrammed. For parallax to be understood, an acceptance of spatial dislocations must occur, where one is not prescribed by dimensionality alone. Excesses are everywhere and become visibly muted in their effect. In parallax, a radical rereading, or perhaps a more appropriate term, an *experience* of space is possible. Parallax redetermines the supererogatory, realigning the human in spatial experience across all dimensions.

Notes

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4. Ibid., pp. 244–5.
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6. David W. Hill and Daryl Martin, 'Visibly Mute: Ethical Sociality and the Everyday Exurban', *Antipode*, 49:2 (2017), 416–36.
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8. Jodi Dean, 'The Object Next Door', *Political Theory*, 35:3 (2007), 371–8 (p. 376).
9. Ibid.
10. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 381.
11. L. A. Kirshner, 'Rethinking Desire: The Objet Petit A in Lacanian Theory', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 53:1 (2015), 83–102 (p. 86).
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13. Hal Foster, 'Medusa and the Real', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 44 (2003), 181–90.
14. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 26.
15. Dean, 'The Object Next Door', pp. 376–7.
16. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 18.
17. Ibid.
19. Dean, 'The Object Next Door', p. 377.
19. Ibid.
20. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 381. The story of Bartleby is commonly associated with Žižek and Žižekians. Žižek is often found on merchandise with 'I would prefer not to'.
21. Ibid., p. 382.
22. Ibid., p. 383.
23. Nadir Lahiji, 'In Interstitial Space – Žižek on "Architectural Parallax"', *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 3:3 (2009), 1.
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25. Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious, Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 20.
26. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, p. 55.
27. Ibid., p. 257.
28. Lahiji, 'In Interstitial Space', p. 4.
29. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, p. 254.
30. Ibid., emphasis added.
31. Lahiji, 'In Interstitial Space', p. 13.
32. Silke Steets, 'Taking Berger and

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Luckmann to the Realm of Materiality: Architecture as a Social Construction', *Cultural Sociology*, 10:1 (2016), 93–108.
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34. Steets, 'Taking Berger and Luckmann to the Realm of Materiality', p. 97.
35. Slavoj Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (London, Bloomsbury, 2020), p. 228.
36. Steets, 'Taking Berger and Luckmann to the Realm of Materiality', p. 98.
37. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, pp. 244–5.
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47. Rendell, *The Architecture of Psychoanalysis*, p. 119.
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51. Cited in Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, p. 287.
52. Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time & Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 401.
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58. Ibid., p. 292.
59. Ibid., p. 24.
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61. Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, p. 293.
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66. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 98.
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94. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, p. 257.
95. Hill and Martin, 'Visibly Mute: Ethical Sociality and the Everyday Exurban', p. 418.

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